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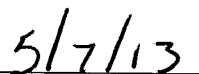
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STUDENT ORGANIZATION ADVISORS

What role do advisors play and how are they trained?

(TITLE)

BY

Tyler J. Micek

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF


Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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STUDENT ORGANIZATION ADVISORS:

What roles do advisors play and how are they trained?

By:

Tyler J. Micek

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all Student Affairs Professionals and Student Organization Advisors for all of the time and energy you devote to students in order provide the best student experience possible. I am the person that I am today because of the dedication and investment people were willing to put in me, and I hope this research helps future students have a similar experience.

Student Organization Advisor Roles and Training

ABSTRACT

The position of a Registered Student Organization faculty or staff advisor is one that encompasses a wide variety of roles; these roles are ever changing based on the situation and the students involved. With each faculty and staff advisor bringing a different set of previous knowledge and experience, advisors may not be fully prepared for all aspects of the job. Some come in with the knowledge of the organization or an understanding of the goals of the organization, but they are not familiar with the operating procedures at the institution or have any background in student development or group dynamics. If Registered Student Organization advisors are not aware of the roles they will take on as an advisor and if they are not trained in a way where they have the tools and resources necessary to be an effective advisor, the institution is doing a disservice to the students. Special focus is given to the additional training and resources they would like in order to be more effective and hope to help other advisors be successful.

Key words: Student organizations, advising, student affairs, advisors, advising resources

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many students, the college experience has evolved to more than just taking classes. Eighty percent of a student's time is spent in activities outside the classroom (Sohn, 2008). This involvement can include sleep, meals, work, socializing, intercollegiate and intramural athletics, leadership activities, study abroad, and student clubs and organizations. Colleges now intentionally provide a variety of opportunities for students to learn and interact outside of the classroom as well because it has been found that these co-curricular activities and interactions enhance student experience, knowledge, and lead to a richer college experience (Astin, 1993; NASPA & ACPA, 2004). One such opportunity is involvement in a student organization. "Student organizations enhance college students' experiences and contribute to the vitality of campus life" (Ahreb, Ryan, & Niskode-Dossett, 2009, p. 25). These organizations not only give students the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop in a more social atmosphere, but many organizations help promote the ideals and desired student outcomes of the institution.

Because of the potential benefits associated with organizational involvement, many universities require each organization to have a faculty or staff advisor. "Today, as institutions expand opportunities for learning and student development outside the classroom, they increasingly rely on faculty and staff members to go beyond traditional academic advising and to supervise students in a variety of campus experiences" (Tribbensee, 2004, p.11). Advisors can be assigned or picked for a variety of reasons. A professor may be required to advise a student organization that focuses on a specific

Organization (RSO) advisors received, and what additional information, support or training they would like to receive. The results of this study provide information for those coordinating advisor training and support on campus and provide rationale for adding training and resources for advisors that are not currently in place. It also can assist current and future advisors in being more knowledgeable about their roles and therefore having a greater impact with the groups they advise and higher probability of success within the organizations they advise. It provides information for those coordinating advisor training and support on campus.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the following research questions to gain insight into advisors' roles and preparation:

RQ1: What do advisors perceive their roles to be within the RSO they advise?

RQ2: What tools or training are RSO advisors given upon taking their positions?

RQ3: What tools or training do RSO advisors wish they had upon taking their positions in order to be better equipped to handle their new role?

Significance of the Study

This study provides a deeper look into the preparation of student organization advisors. This information could prove to be useful when faculty or staff members are first contemplating taking on an advisor role. It also helps the potential or new advisor prepare for the role and assess where they are in regards to the necessary skills and knowledge. Another benefit of this study is to identify new ways to implement training sessions for advisors to increase their effectiveness while working with students as well as be more knowledgeable about their position and the tools that are available to assist

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), this reduces researcher biases within the study, particularly when the interviewing process involves many participants.

Having been a member of numerous organizations as an undergraduate student as well as a student organization co-advisor as a graduate student, the researcher attempted to remove his own biases and assumptions by having the thesis advisor as well as another graduate student code and pull out themes from the interviews. This not only helped remove any personal judgments, but it adds validity to the results by being confirmed by three independent researchers.

Definitions of Terms

Advisor: An adviser is one who gives ideas, shares insight, provides a different perspective, and counsels, among other things. (Stephen Austin State University Student Organization Handbook, 2010)

Executive Board: The President, Vice President(s), Secretary and Treasurer (or equivalent titles), committee chairs and other officer positions as defined by each student organization's constitution. (St. Joseph's University Student Organization Handbook, 2011)

Student Organization or Registered Student Organization (RSO): Recognized student organizations are all student organizations that are formed by currently enrolled students sharing a common goal or interest and have properly completed the necessary forms on time and agree to adhere to guidelines established by the University. (University of Southern California Student Organization and Advisor's Handbook, 2011)

Student Organization Advisor: A faculty or staff member who provides support and guidance to officers and members of a student organization. The advisor not only serves

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Benefits of Student Involvement

College is a new chapter in the lives of most students; there are many new challenges and opportunities. College is also a time for academic and personal development (Astin, 1993). That development includes the acquisition of technical competencies, people skills, and emotional maturity that are necessary for the current and future job markets. Many of these skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, leadership, interpersonal communication, oral presentations, and personal accountability learned both inside and outside of the classroom (Stine, 2000). Many of these skills cannot be directly taught or tested in the same way that content or academic knowledge is within the classroom (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2011). In order to become more comfortable with these skills, students need exposure and experience in situations where they can apply them. Astin (1984) used the term “student involvement” to describe “the amount of physical and psychological time and energy the students invest in the educational process” (p. 518). The educational process he refers to includes almost any form of student involvement in the college experience because each offers some degree of learning through experience and student development.

Astin (1993) suggested that the extent to which students learn and possess some of these less tangible skills depends on their social experience. Student-student interaction provides the strongest positive effects on areas such as leadership development, academic development, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness (ACPA Manual, 2012; Astin, 1993;). An example of a highly

this study the researcher reviewed 20 institutions identified by the site institution as peer and aspirational institutions. The researcher found an average of over 250 student organizations at each of the institutions. Each of these peer institutions require the main advisor to each organization to be a faculty or staff member at the institution, with the majority specifying the need to work at the institution full time. This means that each institution has over 250 faculty and staff members devoting a portion of their time to advising organizations (though some faculty and staff members may advise multiple organizations).

According to Light (2001), the role of advising is complex and “may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience” (p. 81). The word advisor can mean different things to different people who are in various positions at the institution. It is a word or title that gets thrown around frequently, especially on college campuses. Advising, as a general function, is thought of as “the universal task in student affairs, because it exists at the foundation of much of the work [professionals] do” (Love, 2003, p. 507). A student organization’s advisors help provide consistency for students who are taking the organization in their own direction. Advisors provide guidance for both the organization and the individual students (DeAngelis, 1999). Unfortunately, some advisors, both faculty and staff members, are simply ineffective as advisors and do the bare minimum which is usually signing a piece of paper (Williams, 2000).

Advisor Roles

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA), a national organization whose mission is to support college student learning by sharing knowledge among student affairs professionals, has created a handbook for student organization advisors to

not they are what the advisor would suggest. Whether the student succeeds or fails, the advisor's role is to go back and help the students reflect on what happened and learn from their experiences (Hood, 2004).

For advisors to be effective they should establish relationships with students that allow the advisor to enhance the leadership skills of the students which will enable them to work more effectively together as a team. Part of the advisor's job is to work with the students to help them understand their own strengths, weaknesses, work styles, and goals (Felder & Brent, 2005). Advisors are in a better position to step in and assist the students dealing with conflict if the advisors establish relationships with the students first because it gives them insight to personal and group dynamics. Thus, they are able to mediate without bias and assist the group in resolving conflict more professionally (Strauss, 1993). Reich, Ullmann, Loos, and Leifer (2009) stated that the goal of any conflict should be to reach a win-win situation for the students and the organization itself.

When an advisor encourages self-reflection, he or she contributes to the student's ability to pull meaning from their experiences (Felder & Brent, 2005). This self-reflection can be done through thoughtful, honest, and probing questions that challenge the students to really learn more about themselves and the world (Hood, 2004). Students gain the most when they are able to reflect on both their successes and failures. The advisor also is there to motivate and encourage the students to continue to excel and achieve their goals, while also reflecting on their experiences. So students need an advisor to keep them excited about their potential successes and recognize their accomplishments (Fifer, Henschen, Goud, & Ravizza, 2008).

advising can help an organization stay connected with its true mission, especially through transitional periods. It is important for advisors as well as students to understand the group's culture so that they can operate, grow, and learn together most effectively (Ahren, Ryan, & Niskode-Dossett, 2009).

Intentional conversations that examine the nature of group values and beliefs can help begin the process of changing organizational culture. Sometimes significant events provide opportunities to shift culture in a student group more rapidly than normal. By helping students understand what their organizations' values are, advisors can do their part to perpetuate the life and effectiveness of student groups. By incorporating culture into their practice, these organizations' advisors can help their students to make the most of the learning opportunities (Ahren, Ryan, & Niskode-Dossett, 2009).

Risks of Advising

As with everything in life there is some risk of which to be aware, even in advising student groups. Faculty and staff members need to consider the risks when first invited to become an adviser for a student group or extracurricular activity (Tribbensee, 2004). Prospective advisers often focus on the literal description of a group's activities. Do I have the experience to direct a campus play? The interest in this sport? Tribbensee (2004) stated that

Many potential advisers don't realize that they will also be expected to understand a broad range of other issues, including risk management, event planning, transportation, sexual harassment, emergency medical care, alcohol liability, promoting student development, and counseling students through the everyday issues that students in this age range go through to name just a few (p.12).

Lee, most institutions have a policy to help protect faculty and staff when it comes to claims regarding financial compensation, the faculty and staff can still face personal liability suits.

Some of the ways employees may protect themselves from personal liability is through being organized in their work, knowing institutional policies, being current on legal issues related to student affairs, consulting with general counsel and or a risk management team as needed, working towards preventative law, and considering obtaining professional liability insurance (Perez-Velez, 2009, p. 7).

Awareness of the liability issues also helps remove that idea of just being a name on a piece of paper or listed on a website.

Training for Advisors

Institutions should provide a comprehensive training and ongoing support for the advisors so they can anticipate potential problems, work effectively with students to manage risk, and understand their own responsibilities (ACPA Advisor's Manual, 2012). However, a limited number of training programs exist to prepare professionals for advising student organizations (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). According to the websites of the 20 peer institutions researched for this study, only four require their student organization advisors to attend a training or yearly meeting. Only three offer optional or strongly-encouraged trainings sessions, while the rest offer no official training. Each institution offered a handbook for their student organizations or web resources for their organizations and advisors, but the extent to which advisors utilize them as a resource is unknown. The majority of the handbooks were brief in content, and much of the

individual and group dynamics. A number of professionals advise a student organization with no formal training and rely on role modeling from colleagues in the profession or their own past experiences as a student organization member to direct their approach (DeSawal, 2006). If the advisor was a part of the organization previously, they may be reliving their time in the organization as the advisor, and hold on to their own experiences and ideas of what they would do when they were involved in the organization. This inability to differentiate the professionals' own experiences from those of the students with whom they are working could result in an experience for the student organization that is formulaic and not individualized (Zachary, 2001).

Student affairs professionals, academic administrators, faculty, and academic advisors are responsible for student learning. It is important that these individuals are informed on areas such as "theories of student development and learning, factors that contribute to student success and retention rates, and characteristic and needs of diverse student populations" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 28). Unfortunately, many professionals do not receive formal education in these areas. Because of this, "institutions of higher education must encourage and provide professional development to assist them in gaining this knowledge base and related skills" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 28).

Resources for Advisors

Resources that provide information about student organization advising exist in the form of handbooks and manuals (Bloland, 1962; Dunkel & Schuh 1998; Schuh, 1987). Of the 20 peer institutions reviewed, 17 of them have some form of student organization handbook that provides information on the campus rules and policies. They

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Opportunities for students to learn and interact outside of the classroom have been found to enhance student experience, knowledge, and lead to a richer college experience (Astin, 1993; NASPA & ACPA, 2004). When colleges intentionally provide a variety of these opportunities for students, it is important to understand how organizational advisors impact the students' experiences.

“As institutions expand opportunities for learning and student development outside the classroom, they increasingly rely on faculty and staff members to go beyond traditional academic advising and to supervise students in a variety of campus experiences” (Tribbensee, 2004, p.11). Due to all advisors beginning their role with varying degrees of previous knowledge and experience, institutions are doing a disservice to students if they do not effectively prepare advisors for their roles. Colleges must train student organization advisors to provide the organizations and students with necessary assistance and to meet student needs (ACPA Advisor Manual, 2012). This study looked at the roles student organization advisors fill within their organizations at the institution as well as the training and resources they were provided.

Design of the Study

Qualitative methodology in the form of an open-ended interview was used for the purposes of the current study in order to examine the behaviors and opinions of advisors as they reflect upon their experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). During the interview, participants were asked identical open-ended questions, which allowed participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

at the institution for more than five years. After completing nine interviews, the researcher determined that interviewing further participants would not add any new information, and thus was satisfied with nine participants. Further information about the advisors participating in this study is provided below (Table 3.1). In order to maintain anonymity, all descriptions as well as any responses or quotations that are used in the report are represented by pseudonyms.

Faculty Participants. Four of the nine participants were faculty members. Each of these faculty members were hired at the institution for their academic merit and to teach courses in his or her discipline. While faculty members are usually considered experts in their respective fields, few, if any, faculty members have a background that includes specific training with regards to student organizations, advising student groups, or student development theory. At an institution with 246 registered student organizations, 75+ purely academic in nature, many departments look to their faculty to advise organizations related to their area of study. The rest of the 165+ organizations must look to anyone willing and able to take on an additional role in choosing an advisor, though for some advisors, the need for campus and community involvement to work toward tenure does not leave them with much of a choice when asked to take on the advising role. The advisors were a combination of faculty and staff. Participation in this survey was voluntary.

Heidi. Heidi is an associate professor beginning her tenth year at the institution. She has advised an academic organization since coming to the institution. When she first arrived in her position, it was strongly recommended by her department chair to take on

team and asked Denise to be the advisor. Though Denise had prior experience as an advisor to other existing organizations at the institution, her involvement with this athletic organization was her first time to advise a group from its inception.

Bill. Bill is an assistant professor at the institution. He became the advisor to an academic organization in his department two years ago when he began at the institution. It was seen as a requirement for him by the department. According to Bill, any open organization advising positions are given out to the newest faculty members, so he took on this role “by default.”

Ethel. Ethel is an assistant professor and one of two co-advisors to a department-specific academic organization. The advisor position was seen as a requirement by the department because she was the newest faculty member in the department and the person who she was replacing served with her as a co-advisor to the organization. She began advising the organization when she began working at the institution two years ago.

Staff Participants. The remaining five research participants are staff members of the institution, all working within the Division of Student Affairs. Each of these five participants had some form of prior involvement within the organizations they advise. All participants also have an educational background in college student affairs or a related field. Each staff participant works in a department with regular student interaction and has some prior work experience in student affairs. Student development, beyond academics, is a main focus for each staff member.

Alice. Alice has been an assistant director in her area and has been at the institution for three years though she has been working in higher education for 12 years. Her experiences include work within residence halls, student activity programs, and

Isaac. Isaac has finished his sixth year both at the institution and as a co-advisor to a residence life honorary organization. He stated that before he began at the institution, two people were advising the organization he currently advises. When he replaced one of their jobs, he was appointed as a co-advisor as well. Isaac considered it a requirement from his boss to be the advisor.

Instrument

The interview protocol was developed by the researcher. Questions (Appendix B) were designed to assist the researcher in answering the research questions identified for this study. The interview began by asking participants demographic background information, behaviors and opinions of the participants regarding their advising roles, training, and resources as well as suggestions on improving training and resources. The interview also asked participants to identify the most challenging aspect of being an advisor as well as the most rewarding aspect which gave insight to the intrinsic rewards of advising and why they continue to advise the students. The protocol consisted of 15 main questions with multiple, pre-determined follow-up questions to be used when necessary. This interview protocol was tested on two advisors in order to ensure responses elicited from the questions related to the research questions.

Site

The interviews were conducted with advisors at a medium-size, public, Midwestern, predominantly white university with a student population of over 11,600 and over 200 student organizations. The interviews were conducted after the spring semester, during the summer term, and at the beginning of the fall semester.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter describes in detail the themes found during the nine interviews specifically focused on the three research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What do advisors perceive their roles to be within the RSO they advise?

RQ2: What tools or training are RSO advisors given upon taking their positions?

RQ3: What tools or training do RSO advisors wish they had upon taking their positions in order to be better equipped to handle their new role?

The responses to each interview question directly related to at least one of the three research questions. Once responses were analyzed, themes emerged under each research question and are grouped together under topical headings.

RQ1: What do advisors perceive their roles to be within the RSO they advise?

Faculty and staff members become advisors for a variety of reasons, but many times the role fulfills a requirement of some sort. Eight of the nine advisors interviewed were either required, strongly recommended, or as Cathy stated, “voluntold” by the institution or outside source to step in to this role. Only one advisor was approached by the students and chose to sign on as an advisor voluntarily. Whether the advisors were required or volunteered, their presence is mandatory for the organization to operate. Some advisors may only do the very basic requirement of signing their name on institutional forms for the organization (Williams, 2000). Any additional roles within the organization they take on as advisor is based on the specific person, student members, and the organization itself. In the case of this study advisors were asked to define their

possible. These include attending meetings, helping with logistics, and assisting in financial management.

Attend meetings. Each organization has some form of meeting for their members. These meetings may include just the executive boards or leadership teams, special committees, one-on-one with a specific position, or general membership. Alice talked about the importance of attending the meetings of the organizations she advises “[they] are not going to get away with having exec meetings that I’m not attending; [they] would just get away with stuff.” Cathy has a similar mentality and thinks her calendar looks just as busy, if not busier, than most of the members she advises.

I attend all of their chapter meetings when in town, so primarily that is usually 3-4 every month. I am at officer meetings, trainings, standards meetings. Throughout the course of the month, I try to go to at least one social event. Any membership or recruitment events I am present at.

Bill attends a majority of the meetings as well and sets up meetings with the executive members, but leaves the organization up to its members and remains more of a resource to the group. “I go to the meetings and meet with the leadership on a bi-weekly basis if they have questions.” Similarly, Heidi uses her meeting times to help her students develop the skills in leading meetings themselves. “Every other week is the board meeting and the other weeks are the general membership meeting so I attend those meetings. I work with them as far as preparing their agenda, how to put together their schedule, etcetera.”

Logistics. There are certain tasks that organizations can only complete with the assistance of their advisors. These include tasks such as reserving space on campus or

any fundraising efforts to make sure they “fall within the parameters of the university regulations” and do not violate any rules from the national organization.

Efficiency roles. Outside of the basic functional components to advising, there are a variety of other roles advisors must step into in order to ensure the longevity of the organization through ever-changing student membership. Such roles include providing information and clear communication, providing consistency and long-range planning, managing risks, enforcing policies or navigating ethical dilemmas, and holding students accountable.

Provide information and communication. As previously stated, membership and student leadership within an organization can change frequently. Because of this frequency, members need to be educated on the organization, its purpose, procedures and standards as well as important information and procedures from both a national organization (if applicable) and the institution itself (Miles, 2011). Ideally, the student leadership is providing this information and making sure that it is delivered consistently and accurately. Bill stated that he monitors and sends out messages through an organization listserv. He also is in the process of developing a Facebook page for the group so that they can post pictures or documents for all members. Isaac stated that he rarely speaks up during meetings because the students do an excellent job of leading. He normally only speaks when he is directly asked a question. Similarly, Ethel commented numerous times about how self-sufficient the student leaders are with her organization. She articulated that “the most that I have to do is correct spelling and editing” because she does not want messages being sent out or PowerPoints being used at meetings if they have grammatical errors.

management in serving as a national sorority advisor, the actions of chapter members she works with affect not only the well-being of the members on campus, but the status and reputation of chapters all over the United States. Their actions can also bear stronger financial consequences both in the form of fines as well as national dues which includes insurance costs for the national organization. With so much to consider, Cathy takes risk management seriously. She stated “She tries to help keep them out of trouble. If she says no, it is to keep the members out of trouble.”

Policy enforcer and ethical dilemmas. As an advisor, there are times when individuals will have to challenge the students and ultimately make some unpopular decisions. Cathy explained it by saying she cannot always be their “friend.” Sometimes “as an advisor, you are truly there to be an advisor... you really have to have a difficult conversation.” She spoke on the difficulty of the blurry line advisors must maneuver. “When do I have to be the ‘no-fun’ person? My first year advising, it was hard to find balance between being the enforcer or rule person and being the laid back mentor. It’s a hard battle, but you learn.”

Gina discussed the difficulties in the role from an ethical stand point. She said as a supervisor, it is easier to make the ethical calls because “you can say don’t do that or you will get fired and back that up.” As an advisor on the other hand, you do not have the same authority, “sometimes your hands are tied... If you have someone who does something that is a little shady but not illegal or against policy, it is harder. You can have those conversations.” Unfortunately, the conversations do not always go the way she wants them to, but she stated that those are really the developmental opportunities. Even if it does not “click” for the student right then and there, she said many times the student

Advisors of organizations with different purposes agreed on the importance of accountability and helping the students develop a sense of responsibility not only to themselves, but to others and the organization as a whole. By working to instill these values and skills in the students with whom they work, the advisors feel as though they are helping prepare students to be successful not only while they are at the institution, but for their post-collegiate experiences as well.

Student focused roles. Outside of the successful functioning and maintenance of the organization itself, each advisor discussed the important roles they play dealing with the human element. The roles they describe are focused on the more personal connections to the students and include being a sounding board for the students, helping them gain or develop their own skills, acting as a supporter, and building relationships.

Sounding board. The participants talked about the need for students to have someone they can talk to about organization functions and that sometimes students just need someone to be present and help them walk or talk through a situation. Ethel's mindset when going into the board meetings is just to listen. She said she "knows they are adults," so she lets them make the decisions and adds insight when asked. Similarly, Bill talked about his role as a sounding board. "I really try to be present without micromanaging so they come to me when they have questions, ideas, thoughts, I am there to hear it but I try not to be overbearing."

Skill development and application. Each of the advisors spoke about the benefits and skills the members gain from being a part of their organizations, and how one of their key roles was to assist with that skill building. Cathy said that her role "is really just to be a mentor to build these women up to do the job themselves." She said that she is never

have fun and enjoying their success during the tournaments and to see how proud they were. That is why you do it!

Frank explains his “role as an advisor is to support, provide advice, and sign paperwork for the RSO.” He too spoke on how it is important for the students to take ownership and responsibility for their organization, and ultimately, the success or failure of the organization is on the students. He stated that this was the best part of being an advisor. “Watching students succeed. Watching their hard work, when they spend a semester on a project and then watching it all come together and watching them grow and become a part of it... Really watching them succeed and challenge themselves.”

Gina compared her experience advising to having a child. “It is like having a baby, a real life baby. They just need so much and everything they do they need approval for it.” She wants the best outcome for her students, but that does not always happen. “If they don’t get approval, you have to follow up a lot and make sure they are doing ok. So it is very taxing, there are a lot of meetings because you have to meet with everyone.” Denise also spoke of the freedom and guidance she provides to the students within her organization. She said it is sometimes a struggle to know when to step in and when to let the students figure it out on their own because ultimately, it is their organization:

I am like a parent or coach where I give them some suggestions but they make their own decisions, good or bad. Sometimes I try to point out things they may not have seen, but I let everything play out their way because it is their organization.

Frank mentioned that his method of advising may have changed slightly after becoming a father himself. “I see my role as to advise students, ultimately it is their

job responsibilities at the institution include advising various student organizations, has a difficult time explaining some aspects of her job to others:

When people ask you why students are texting you at night or the weekend, well, they have a problem and they know that I am going to advise them, and so I think those are the rewards - knowing that they can count on you and that they benefit personally, not only while at the institution from what you are offering them.

Gina has a similar mindset regarding the relationship she has with her students. The students she advises live together in the same residence hall which increases the amount of time the students are around one another. Also, as a live-in housing staff member at the institution, her student leaders see her outside of the organization setting more frequently as well. She interacts with her student leaders in their natural environments, such as in the dining halls, common areas, and running into a student in the halls. “I think it is really, enlightening I guess, when you see those students, from where they start to where they are a year later, and seeing them grown, and learning, and working together and building that team.” She continually spoke to the pride she has in each of the students she advises as well as the group as a whole. “It is really exciting I think because you know that in some way you have made an impact on the organization. You know it is worth it in the end because you have made a difference.”

Educating through supported failure. Seven of the nine advisors specifically spoke on the difficulty between helping the students be successful and letting them learn through failure. Heidi explains that she tries to “guide them and give them direction, but when they are set on doing something I just have to sit back and let them do it and see how it plays out.”

Providing individualized experience. Another difficult aspect of advising student organizations and leaders is realizing that every student and every situation will be different (McCluskey-Titus, 2004). There is not one blueprint for advising. Alice spoke extensively on how her role varies based on the student she is working with and their individualized needs and skill set:

I try to meet the students where they are at so with each group or within a particular group, you get students at all different levels. If I advised each of them the exact same way, I wouldn't be helping them on their development. With one-on-ones, I look at the individual person. Then I try to do a lot of individualized advising to the students. I feel that they get more developmental opportunities and do better within the organizations. If there are two of them working together on a program or project, and they are in different skill set areas, so my approach may be a little different.... The other thing that I do with a group is look at the culture of the entire group. So when I am at an executive meeting, how do I advise the whole group?

Gina also focuses on the needs of the specific students or organizations she is advising. She advises two separate organizations, both within housing, but according to her, they each have very different needs:

For [organization 1], they are in a very dualistic stage of leadership so I have to do a lot more hands on stuff. A lot more one on ones with them, to be more in tune with them, send more emails, and just more hands on. They are very young and very immature as an organization.”

with what they said their vision was. That is what we do as an advisor, motivate people. I think it is a lost art. I know there are a lot of us older professionals that we have had that conversation. Many entry-level professionals want to go straight to supervising, but really those skills that you learn as an advisor will make you a much better supervisor.

Being an advisor is not something that all can or will do well (Williams, 2000). Advisors like students develop over time. And, not all faculty and staff at an institution will want to take on this responsibility. When speaking of the challenges associated with advising, Alice states that “it is definitely not for everybody. I think a lot of people think they can be an advisor but they can’t.” In order to be as beneficial as possible, she argues that you really have to want the position and want to make a difference in the students’ lives. “I would say that it is something that is your calling and passion, and then it can be really one of the most rewarding things of your life.”

RQ2: What tools or training are RSO advisors given upon taking their positions?

As Cathy stated, “advising is not for everybody.” Participants were asked to discuss what preparation or training they had received in taking on the advisor role. In order to effectively advise a student organization, the advisor should have a knowledge and skill base that is not necessarily inherent to all faculty and staff positions at an institution (Williams, 2000). It was important in this study to look at what tools or training advisors receive upon taking on the advising role both prior to advising and throughout their advising experience.

Pre-advising. When a faculty or staff member takes on the position of advisor to a student organization, the advisor must draw upon knowledge and experience to aid in

the institution called the square one manual that he frequently uses. “Say you were having an issue with motivation. Well the manual gives ideas or tips to use.”

Outside of the institution. While Cathy stated that she did not receive any training from the institution prior to advising, she received some assistance from the national sorority she works with. “When I came into the role, I was given a binder of resources at the time but there was no training that went along with it. I hit the ground running that first August.” The binder contained materials such as job aids for each of the undergraduate student positions including their duties, national bylaws and policies, the current volunteer structure including contact information of the person she reports to, as well as basic information on how to navigate the members resource area of their website.

Likewise, Ethel has been a member of the national, professional version of her organization for many years and has an extensive working knowledge of the organization’s mission, purpose, and desired outcomes. This knowledge aids her in understanding the direction the national organization desires for the student-run organizations. One of her goals with the organization is to help the student “get involved in the organization so hopefully after they leave here they will join as professionals.”

Previous experiences. Many of the advisers rely on information they received prior to arriving at the current institution. Alice has a background with other Student Affairs related positions she had previous to her current job including advising about six other organizations. Within that role, she went through numerous training modules and attended conferences along the way. She stated that she learned a lot about how to advise while attending housing training and working with hall governments at other institutions. “Going to housing conferences, there was an advising track so using some of those tools

does not work with regards to interacting with their students. The students they are working with are also changing each year which requires advisors to be aware of what they are doing and how they do it. Besides knowledge through personal experience, there is an opportunity for advisors to continually receive training or resources throughout their time with an organization.

Institutional. Once again, seven of the nine advisors stated that there was no continual or ongoing training that they were aware of provided by the institution. Denise said that the only training or advice that she receives is through intentionally speaking to colleagues at the institution and in talking with other colleagues about how they advise.

Gina stated that she has not received any specific training, but it was more like continual, on-the-job training. She is now the leadership coordinator for the department so she trains the new departmental staff. Within this position, she has added an emphasis on leadership development and advising at one meeting every month. She has a strong love for student development and leadership theory and believes “it is the foundation of our existence as our profession,” so she will use it as part of training other new advisors whenever possible. In focusing on training incoming graduate students and professionals to be advisors, she has the opportunity to dig deeper into advising and leadership theories adding to her knowledge base.

Outside experiences. Many of the advisors emphasized the importance of staying current on topics in higher education, advising, and their specific content area in order to be an effective advisor. They did this in a variety of ways.

Alice tries to “stay up with readings and current trends that are going on in higher education.” She said there are a variety of online resources available that she frequently

the conferences that she is unable to attend to learn about any new legislation or bylaws passed that will affect the students.

Gina and Isaac, both in housing, rely extensively on their colleagues. Gina states that her colleagues at other institutions and her current supervisor are key in her success. When dealing with difficult situations, she “definitely uses them and picks their brains because they may have gone through something similar.” Isaac, as a more seasoned professional, frequently draws on his own experiences as an advisor, but also frequently utilizes his colleagues as well, specifically asking them for feedback when he faces difficult or challenging situations with the group he advises. If others are not available to speak with, each has their “go-to” second choice. Gina considers herself “hi-tech” and will use the internet to research her questions.

Summary. Based on the advisors interview, there is little to no training or resources provided to advisors at this institution prior to taking on their roles or throughout their time as advisors. Each advisor relies on his or her previous experiences and knowledge when beginning the advising role. They also personally search out opportunities to find tools that will help them be as successful as possible with their organizations.

RQ3: What tools or training do RSO advisors wish they had upon taking their positions in order to be better equipped to handle their new role?

Each advisor will come in with a different skill set and a different background in working with students and even the organization they advise. The more informed and knowledgeable an advisor is about the institution, the group, and institutional expectations, the more effective he or she will be in the advisor role. Bill commented

Logistics. Much of the training advisors said they would have liked prior to taking on the position dealt with the institutional specific information of advising a student organization. Alice specifically stated that “I think I just needed to know more of the logistics – posting signs, chalking the sidewalks – the things that are more campus rules and regulations.” Ethel would have wanted “some kind of handbook or manual that this is what it means to be an advisor.” Heidi also stated the importance of having a guide and suggested “a whole list of rules that you have to abide by that sometimes are overlooked like... I would like a quick reference sheet.” She also stated that it would be useful for the students to have access to such a document. That way “they could know those rules and catch it without me. So they don’t end up getting themselves in trouble without knowing they are doing something wrong.” Topics Heidi suggested for this document included how to schedule institutional facilities, regulations on institutional logo use, policies on creating t-shirts or publications for the organization, handling organizational finances, and fundraising guidelines.

Some topics the advisors discussed wanting more information about or included in an advisor training included information on how to run a meeting or keep students engaged in the decision making process, Robert’s Rules of Order, and discussing a typical timeline for a normal organization which would include areas such as meetings, elections, recruitment, and so on. All of these areas and more could be discussed at a half-day workshop for advisors that was suggested by Frank. He would have wanted to go over these, and similar other topics in an open forum style discussion as well as a proposed advisor handbook. If these opportunities were provided, Frank stated that advisors would have a much better understanding of what it means to be an advisor.

community to talk about mentoring 101” to new fraternity and sorority advisors to help get all advisors critical information on how to help positively influence the students during an extremely developmental stage in the students’ lives. By understanding where the individual students are developmentally, Cathy thinks it might be easier to address issues with the group as a whole.

Networking. Each advisor explained that, as advisors, they needed a network for themselves to be connected to in order to be most beneficial in their role. One big question that Ethel struggled with was where she would turn to if her organization ran into problems.

Sorority advisors appear to be equipped better than some of the other advisors on campus. Cathy explained that each year all of the sorority advisors meet with each other and discuss current issues within their respective group. This is a way for new advisors to connect with seasoned advisors who have been in their roles for over 20 years. Through this unofficial network, they have created their own list serve where they can reach out to each other for advice or to warn each other about potential issues they have heard about.

Similar to the network that Cathy and the rest of the sorority advisors created, Heidi proposed creating a network for all organization advisors within the institutions. This would give her someplace to turn when she is confronted with issues advising her organization.

I think that it would be nice to have someone to discuss best practices.

student organizations. Frank also added that it is always good to continually look at strategies to “help your students develop marketing for the organization or how to recruit new members. Those are some training that would really help the advisors and students.”

Culture and developmental. After getting through the initial stages of being an organizational advisor, Denise said that “one of the things that we are struggling with is helping them create a long term plan of action for when the current officers move on to other things if they graduate or stop playing.” Denise said that she would like to be able to have discussions with other advisors, especially other athletic organization advisors, about how they keep their rosters full and allow younger students to take on more leadership roles.

Even after advising a variety of groups for multiple years, Frank still has questions regarding advising. “How do you keep your students accountable? How to work with the group dynamics of a student group?” Other concerns Frank has include technology and “keeping on track of what your students are doing; they are moving to things such as twitter, Facebook, and just knowing what they are doing out there in the name of their organizations.” Frank thinks it would be very beneficial to have the opportunity to speak with other advisors about new trends regarding social media, how it affects the organization, and what should or should not be monitoring with regards to social media.

When Gina was asked what area advisors need continual training on, her response was “ethics is a big one in advising, integrity and ethical dilemmas... we focus a lot more on critical thinking as well.” Gina spoke to the benefits that could be gained if advisors had the knowledge to connect student development theory and leadership theory to the

or a better way to communicate with other advisors.” Through this network or listserv, Bill talked about being better connected and able to gather more opinions that would help him better serve the students.

Similarly, Isaac spoke about having a network of advisors to continually challenge his way of thinking and gaining new perspectives. He stated that sometimes it would be beneficial to bring in outside advisors from other institutions. Reflecting on his own experiences, “I think my advising would be the same but getting a different perspective from someone at a different institution or been doing it longer could be beneficial.” He stated that he still contacts his colleagues from other institutions with whom he had worked previously, and that those conversations are the ones that challenge him the most to be the best advisor possible.

Summary. Most advisors have had a very individualized experience and are at different points in their own professional development and advising experience. Isaac explained that “advising is a very personal thing and everyone does it differently but can get the same result. It is important to know your style and how to get through the roadblocks.” Though no two advisors provided the same information on their experiences, a few clear themes emerged. First, advisors have to juggle a variety of roles within the organization. Second, advisors at this institution are not provided with enough training or resources upon taking on their advising position, nor do they feel they receive adequate ongoing training or resources. And third, they show a strong desire to have some sort of formalized advisor training or network to help establish the resources available to them and assist in providing the students with the best experience possible.

Chapter V

Results and Conclusions

This chapter will pull together the data gathered from the organization advisors and be interpreted by first summarizing the information and then drawing conclusions on what the data means for advisors and institutions.

Findings

This study focused first on discussing the multiple roles that advisors fill as identified by the advisors themselves broken down by categories. Then it went on to discuss the training, tools, and resources received prior to taking on the advisor position and finally outlined the training, tools, and resources that the advisors would like to have. Based on the information found through the research and the input of the advisors interviewed, the results and conclusions will be discussed within the contents of the research questions.

Advising roles. Taking on a student organization advising position is much more involved than many faculty or staff members may think. When some students approach potential advisors asking them to sign onto the organization, the students tend to think mostly of the basic operational need of having an advisor (Williams, 2000). As the advisors indicated, in order to be an effective advisor who does more than just sign forms, advisors need to be able to juggle a multitude of different roles including basic functioning roles such as attending meetings and assisting in financial management; efficiency roles such as providing information and providing consistency; and supportive roles such as being a sounding board for the students and helping them gain or develop their own skills. A well-rounded advisor will be able to balance each of these roles at

study was provided to residence life staff for those in housing staff positions where they are required to advise hall councils in their buildings. This training is mainly focused towards new graduate students who do the majority of the council advising. Outside of that, there are no specific advisor trainings that anyone mentioned receiving at the institution. Some received minimal training through previous institutions or through the national organization at a conference, but these trainings were only available to those advisors within certain organizations and required extra time or effort for the advisors to seek out the experience (DeSawal, 2006; Dunkel 2004; Dunkel & Schuh, 1998).

Many of the advisors commented that they would have liked to receive a handbook or manual upon taking on their advising position like ones that were offered at the peer institutions. By having a copy of this manual, the advisors would be more effective in their roles, they would know where to go when they have questions such as how to reserve a room and they would have a quick reference list of various other resources available to them. One interesting thing to point out is that there is an advisor's manual online on the institution's website. The 64-page manual is over four years old and slightly out of date at the time of the study, but the fact remains that none of the advisors were aware of this potential resource provided for them.

Desired training and resources. Many of the advisors talked about wanting or expecting to have some form of an advisor training prior to taking on their advisor responsibilities. The participants talked about how it would have been beneficial to them prior to beginning their advising role and would like to see something implemented. This could include information provided to all new faculty and staff members about what it

advisory roles with student organizations. It starts with informing all faculty and staff members about what it looks like to be an advisor. At some point during their time at the institution, a large number of faculty and staff members will have the opportunity to advise an organization. A suggestion from one of the advisors was to include a section in the new faculty and staff member orientation which would give a brief overview of the advising position, minimum requirements and commitments, various roles they could take on, a list of resources available to advisors, and where to go with any other questions they might have about advising. Providing this to faculty and staff as they enter and have yet to commit to these roles is important because not only does it emphasize the importance of working with student organizations, it provides a clear and consistent message and reaches all new employees.

The next step would be to further develop the resources currently available to advisors. Specifically, the 64-page advisor handbook should be updated, condensed, reorganized, and distributed to all advisors. Based on the handbooks from institutional peers as well as the feedback from the advisors, the advisor handbook should include an overview of the advising position and roles, logistics on being an advisor, institutional policies and procedures, basic student development theory, an overview of Robert's Rules of Order, frequently asked questions, and a list of available resources. After the handbook is updated and distributed, supplemental material should be made available to all advisors. The advisors articulated that they felt they could be more effective if they had access to the following additional resources: sample templates for constitutions, bylaws, agendas, and minutes; year-long timelines for typical organizations including

current advisors. This would allow for more open dialogue about the overall student organization culture on campus as discussing first hand some of the struggles and victories from peers who have been in the advising role already. The new advisors would also have the opportunity to talk about any specific concerns they have prior to officially signing on to advise as well as have a better understanding of where to go with any future questions they may have. By offering this training each semester, the advisors would go through the experience as a smaller group creating a cohort-type relationship among advisors and a built-in core network for them.

Second, a listserv could be created to include all institutional advisors. This would serve as a great resource as the sorority advisor listserv has been a resource for Cathy. Through this listserv, advisors would be able to keep in regular communication with not only their cohort from training but all of the advisors on campus in order to discuss topics as they come up or are time sensitive. For example, if an advisor needed ideas on marketing plans or a retreat template, they would be able to post the question to the group and get a response from anyone having insight. It would also be a great way for advisors to get advice on how to handle difficult situations that may arise.

The third and most important recommendation for continual training and support would be to have monthly round table discussions. These round tables should be organized through the Student Life Office due to their interaction and oversight of the Registered Student Organizations. This would give each advisor the opportunity to meet with other advisors in person and discuss whatever issues were pertinent at the time. The round tables could set up to have organization types clustered together so that academic organizations communicate with other academic organizations while athletic

alongside the data from the advisors' perspectives would allow institutions to assess how congruent the two perspectives are. If the perspectives do not align, then the advisor and student organization would have to discuss the incongruencies and decide if the partnership will be effective or what issues need to be addressed in order for the partnership to be effective.

The third topic for additional research based on this study would be analyzing where the training and resources for advisors does or should come from, the local institution or the national organization (if applicable). As the advisors in this study pointed out, some student organizations are a subset of a national organization. Many times these national organizations have some sort of support for organization advisors. Assessing what tools or training are best provided on the national level for the specific organization could help institutions narrow down the training and resources some advisors need and focus more of their time or attention to advisors that lack national organization support.

Conclusion

The position of a Registered Student Organization faculty or staff advisor is one that encompasses a wide variety of roles; these roles are ever changing based on the situation and the students involved. They range from functioning roles which help the organization exist and operate at the institution to efficiency roles to assist the organization as a whole operate as effectively as possible to supporting roles where advisors can be there for the students and help them develop the skills and abilities necessary for life after college.

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Appendix A

Email to Advisors

Professor (**Insert last name**),

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study. As a master's student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University, I am currently conducting research for my thesis on student organization advisors under the supervision of Dr. Dianne Timm.

As you are an advisor at EIU, I would like to invite you to arrange an in-person interview where you will be asked to talk about your role as an advisor as well as the resources and training provided to you. I will be scheduling interviews to take place between during the early part of summer as schedules allow.

The interview will last about one hour and would be arranged at a time convenient to your schedule. To ensure the accuracy of your input, I would ask your permission to audio record the interview.

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may decline to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, simply by letting me know your decision. All information you provide will be considered confidential unless otherwise agreed to, and the data collected will be kept in a secure location and confidentially disposed of in five years time.

Your name and the name of your organization will not appear in any thesis or publications resulting from this study unless you provide express consent to be identified and have reviewed the thesis text and approved the use of the quote. After the data have been analyzed, you will receive a copy of the executive summary. If you would be interested in greater detail, an electronic copy (e.g., PDF) of the entire thesis can be made available to you.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information about participation, please contact me at (402) 943-8722 or by email at tjmicek@eiu.edu. You can also contact my supervisor Dr. Timm by telephone at (217) 581-2400 or by email at dtimm@eiu.edu.

I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board. However, the final decision to participate is yours.

Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

- 1) Please tell me your name and position with the university, in addition to a bit about yourself (where did you go to school, what were you involved in, etc.).
- 2) How long have you been at the university?
- 3) What student organization(s) do you advise?
- 4) How long have you been an advisor for this (these) organization(s)?
- 5) How did you become an advisor to your RSO?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: Is your advising required, voluntary, etc.?
- 6) Please describe your role within the RSO you advise.
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: What activities or duties do you perform as advisor?
 - b. Follow-up if necessary: What does a typical week or month look like for you in terms of your position as an advisor?
- 7) What training did you receive upon becoming the advisor to your RSO?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: How did you receive this training?
 - b. Follow-up if necessary: Who provided this training?
 - c. Follow-up if necessary: What qualifications (experience or previous knowledge) did you have in order to become the advisor?
- 8) What additional training before taking on this position would have been helpful?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: How would you like this additional training to look?
 - b. Follow-up if necessary: What areas or topics would this additional training cover?
- 9) What type of ongoing (semesterly, yearly, etc.) training do you receive for your advising position?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: What does this training look like?
- 10) What additional ongoing training would be helpful?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: How would you like this additional training to look?
 - b. Follow-up if necessary: What areas or topics would this additional training cover?
 - c. Follow-up if necessary: What trainings would you attend?
- 11) What tools or resources do you utilize as an advisor?
 - a. Follow-up if necessary: Who provides these tools or resources?
 - b. Are you aware of resources available on the website? Have you accessed them? Do you utilize these in your role as advisor?
- 12) What additional tools or resources do you wish you had upon taking this position would have helped better equip you for this advising role?
- 13) What is the most challenging part of being an advisor?
- 14) What is the most rewarding part of being an advisor?

In signing this form, I:

- ___ 1) agree to participate in all aspects of the study voluntarily;
- ___ 2) am aware of and agree to the audio recording of all interviews;
- ___ 3) recognize that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time;
- ___ 4) am giving permission to use any quotations without attribution.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this thesis research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator

Date